

Lesson Three

PERSEVERING IN THE PROMISED LAND

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-8

Part three summarizes the main points of the first two studies and focuses on building habits to help avoid relapse and falling back into unhealthy patterns. This study sees Deuteronomy 6:1-8 as God's instructions to his people on how not to lose the land God had given by giving in to pagan values. These instructions call for daily, weekly, discipleship and commitment.

These are the commands, decrees, and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children, and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:1-8

It is almost unbearable to watch a beloved individual or team lose something they seemingly have won: a runner that pulls up too soon or a team that celebrates and allows the opposition to score. Both illustrate a loss of focus and commitment. In this part, we are going to examine God's instructions about how to preserve the hard-fought victories by "Persevering in the Promised Land."

LET'S REVIEW

Call upon the Lord for help.

Getting out of Egypt, breaking bad habits and addictions, and changing unhealthy relationships require a great deal of energy. That is why it's vital to call upon the Lord for help as the Israelites did (Ex. 2:23-24; Psalm 116:1-2). These unhealthy traits and patterns can be deeply embedded in someone's life. God's power is needed to overcome them. Calling upon the Lord also requires someone to admit they need help. It's necessary to acknowledge something is a problem to begin to overcome it. The Christian desiring to change walks the delicate balance between surrendering to God's power to change (Phil. 1:6) and exerting effort to grow (Phil. 2:12).

Moses had to face his past and go back to Egypt for his people to have a future.

God called Moses to go back to Egypt from where he had fled as a murderer and a failure, to step out in faith and stretch himself far beyond what he believed he could accomplish (Ex. 3-4).

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

LESSON THREE: PERSEVERING IN THE PROMISED LAND

To break bad habits and addictions, and to change unhealthy relationships, one must admit they have a problem and step out in faith to overcome it. It may be necessary to have difficult conversations because of past actions or to confront long festering problems. In Luke 3, the people are convicted by John the Baptist preaching. They ask, “*What then should we do?*” (Luke 3:10) John then tells the crowd to share with others, tax collectors to not cheat people, soldiers not to extort money. He tells them in response to God’s mercy they are to act. To break bad habits and addictions and to change unhealthy relationships, one has to do more than acknowledge the bad effects of their lifestyle; they need to act. They need to change!

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, we must persevere through discouragement.

The day to day difficulties of the wilderness discouraged the Israelites, causing them to look back to a past that

overlooked the burdens of slavery. It was a revisionist history of life in Egyptian slavery, longing for ease and abundance of food rather than facing the day to day struggles of living as a free people.

Most entrenched bad habits, addictions and unhealthy relationships take time to work out. One generation formed by slavery and pagan values had to die. What “bit of Egypt” needs to die in your life?

- Your outlook?
- Your attitude?
- Your priorities?
- Your self-image?

What needs to die or be transformed to break the bad habits and addictions that limit your life? What individuals do you need to avoid to not fall back into unhealthy patterns? What are the patterns, responses and unhealthy expectations in your relationships that restrict and mar your life?

“It took a few months to get the Israelites out of Egypt, but 40 years to get Egypt out of the Israelites.”

WILLIAM BRIDGES
MANAGING TRANSITIONS



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PERSEVERANCE IN THE PROMISED LAND

Breaking bad habits, addictions, and changing unhealthy relationships requires "Perseverance in the Promised Land."

When trying to break dysfunctional patterns of behavior, one often lets their guard down after initial success. The book of Deuteronomy illustrates a call to show love for God by upholding God's covenant and obeying his teachings. Before the massive military campaign to enter the Promised Land, one might assume there would be detailed instructions from the Lord dealing with military strategy. Instead, the emphasis is on cultivating habits to combat the pagan influences that will undermine the initial military victories. The military victories are almost taken for granted if God's people remain faithful. Even before the launch of the campaign, God is instructing his people how to live in the not yet conquered land. That is where the real danger lies!

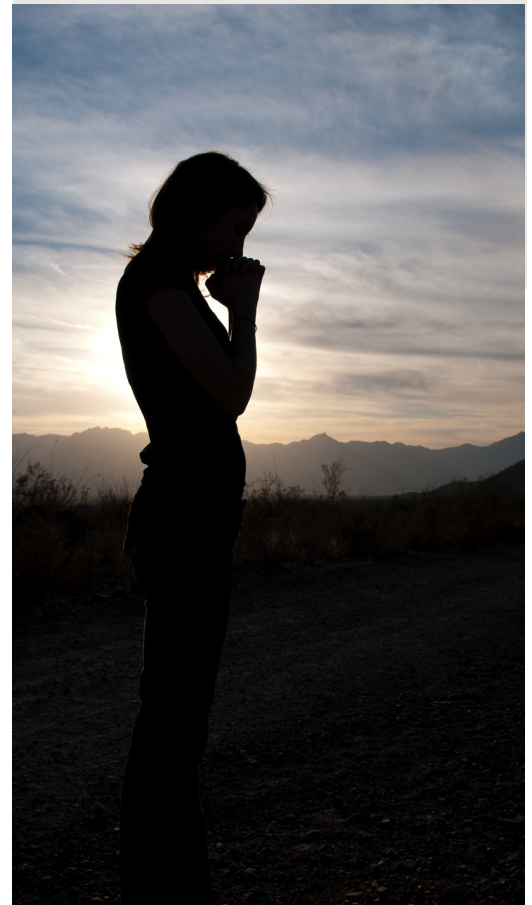
Moses instructed his people to focus on commitment and develop daily habits:

- *Love the Lord with your entire being* (vv. 5-6) – Lasting change requires complete commitment after the initial victories.
- *Impress them on your children* – Cultivate habits for the next generation. This can only be done by repeated instructions, regular teaching through word and deed.
- *Talk about them...at home...when you lie down...when you get up...when you are walking...tie them on your hands...bind them on your head...write them on the door frame and gates* (vv. 7-9).

A continuous commitment is needed to avoid falling back into old habits and patterns of behavior. A daily discipline of prayer and personal renewal, a commitment to change how we respond to negative situations is what leads to lasting and significant change. This leads to the Hebrews writer's call to lay aside the sins *"that beset us and easily entangle us"* (Hebrews 12:1, KJV).

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

HEBREWS 12:1-2



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For the writer of Hebrews, faith is the spiritual power from which comes the energy that enables believers to live ethical and moral lives. The writer of Hebrews is connecting the perseverance that the “Hall of Fame” faithful showed in their lives in chapter 11 to exhort the faithful readers to throw off the sin that besets or so easily entangles. *“The Greek word used for race is agnon from which we get the word ‘agonize.’ The picture the writer of Hebrews is trying to convey is ... rigorous training, self-discipline, and intense effort. The word perseverance, hypomone in the Greek has a sense of endurance in the face of hostile forces...”* - Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Vol. XII, Fred Craddock, page 148

Research on the brain reveals that falling back into old patterns can be as simple as reverting to an old routine.

Habits never really disappear. They are encoded into the structures of our brain and that is a huge advantage for us, because it would be awful if we had to relearn how to drive after every vacation. The problem is that your brain can’t tell the difference between good and bad habits, and so if you had a bad one, it’s always lurking there waiting for the right cues and rewards.” - The Power of Habit, Charles Duhigg, page 20

This insight about human nature is why God inspired these texts about daily routine. In a culture constantly giving cues and encouragement for pagan practices, the daily commitments were intended to guide God’s people to avoid these practices. This routine was about immersing the Hebrews into daily focus to living the values of their faith.

Think about the many Biblical warnings about “backsliding” to individuals and the nation of Israel to avoid going back to former ways by “flirting” with pagan practices:

- King Ahaz walked back in the “high places” and returned to the way of pagan kings (2 Kings 16:1-4).
- God gave instructions to Moses to destroy the “high places” so the temptation to walk in their ways would be removed (Numbers 33:50-53).
- The prophet Hosea called upon his people to repent so God would heal them (Hosea 14:1-4).
- In Paul’s letters to the church in Galatia, he exhorted the church members to not turn back “to those weak and miserable practices” (Galatians 4:8-11).
- This is seen in the words of Jesus to put your hand to the plow and not go back (Luke 9:62).
- John says to stay away from sinful practices and acquaintances; to intentionally walk in the light and not in the darkness (1 John 1:5-7).
- In the book of Revelation, the church at Ephesus is called to remember the “...heights from which you have fallen” and called to repent. (Revelation 2:4-5).



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This may mean choosing to go to a support group even when we don't feel like we need it.

This means staying away from acquaintances that could cause us to relapse or fall into old habits. *"Do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character!"* 1 Corinthians 15:33.

This means a daily recommitment and focus on practicing the habits to build and maintain healthy relationships.

This means reading the Bible, and daily prayer, even when it feels like the prayers go no further than the ceiling.

This means attending worship when the sermon series seems irrelevant.

These habits prepare us to be receptive to things we have no idea God is going to do.

These observations about the Israelite's journey out of slavery through the wilderness and into the Promised Land reveals steps needed to break bad habits and addictions and to change unhealthy relationships.

This series using the Israelites' journey out of Egypt, through the wilderness and into the Promised Land can help everyone identify steps to help change their lives and recognize ways to help others in a journey to healing and wholeness.

